Eco-Ethics

Student Activity 30

Introduction:
This activity is designed to give students the opportunity to examine their own values and beliefs as they relate to the environment, population and social issues. It is not the intent of this activity to prescribe “right” and “wrong” answers for the students. In some cases, students may perceive what would be the most ethical solution to a given problem, while admitting that they realistically might not choose that option. For each Dilemma Card, the action choices are preceded by “would you” rather than “should you.” This will encourage students to offer what they probably would do in each given situation. It might be useful to compare students’ reactions to each dilemma both before and after going through the student readings and lessons.

Procedure:
1. Copy and cut up the dilemma cards. Other dilemmas could be written that are more specific to problems in your area. Students could also be involved in the process of creating the Dilemma Cards with each student responsible for writing one dilemma. Dilemmas can be left entirely open-ended with no options suggested for consideration.
2. Divide the class into groups of four, and give each group a stack of Dilemma Cards. Place them face down at the center of the group.
3. The first student draws a card from the top of the stack. The student studies the situation, decides what he or she would do, and formulates his or her reasons.
4. When the student is ready — typically in less than two minutes — the student reads the situation and the options aloud to the rest of the group. The student gives the decision he or she has chosen, and briefly describes the reasoning involved. In turn, each of the other members of the group is invited to comment on the dilemma, and what he or she would do in the situation. The discussion of each dilemma by the members of the group should take about five minutes. The person whose dilemma is being discussed should have the opportunity to ask questions of the other members of the group, and to offer clarification about his or her decision. The discussion gives the students experience in having ideas examined by peers, and is intended to remind the students of the need to take personal responsibility for decision-making. It is not necessary and may not be desirable for the students to reach consensus; there are legitimately diverse views of the most appropriate and responsible actions to take in many situations. The purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to examine, express, clarify and take responsibility for their own reasoning.
5. The card is then returned to the bottom of the stack and the next student selects a card from the top of the stack. Continue this process until each student has had the opportunity to express his or her decision and rationale about a dilemma.

Follow-up Activity:
Have each student choose a dilemma and write a short paragraph on the positive and negative effects of all the options listed for that dilemma. They should indicate what additional information, if any, is needed in order to make a responsible and informed decision. Students should identify what seems, in their judgment, to be the most responsible decision — and explain their reasoning.

Concept:
Lessons on population, environment and the global society should have their applications in daily personal decision making.

Objectives:
Students will be able to:
• Take positions on dilemmas.
• Formulate and present reasons for their positions.
• Discuss the dilemmas and positions in groups.

Subjects:
Environmental science, social studies

Skills:
Decision making, critical thinking, discussion, writing

Method:
While considering various dilemmas, students examine their own values and beliefs related to environmental issues, and evaluate possible actions they might take that have impacts on the environment.

Materials:
Copies of Dilemma Cards

**Eco-Ethics**

**Dilemma Card**

You are president of a large corporation. You are very interested in pollution control and have had a task force assigned to study the pollution your plant is creating. The task force reports that you are barely within the legal requirements. The plant is polluting the community's air and water. To add the necessary equipment to reduce pollution would cost so much that you would have to lay off 50 employees. Would you:
- add the equipment and fire the employees?
- not add the equipment?
- wait a few years to see if the costs of the equipment will drop?
- hire an engineering firm to provide further recommendations?
- other? (specify)

**Dilemma Card**

You love children and would like to have a large family. You are aware, however, of the world's population is expected to double in the coming century. Would you:
- plan to have a large family anyway?
- decide not to have children?
- limit yourself to one or two children?
- other? (specify)

**Dilemma Card**

You are finally able to build the home your family has dreamed about. After reviewing the plans for your home, you realize that you cannot include all of the features you had planned for, due to rising construction costs. If you can only choose to include one of the following features, would you choose:
- solar heating?
- recreation room with fireplace?
- hot tub and sauna?
- greenhouse?
- other? (specify)

**Dilemma Card**

You are having a picnic with your family at the beach and you see another family leaving to go home, without having picked up its own trash. It is clear the other family is going to leave litter all around. Would you:
- move quickly and ask them to pick up the trash before they leave?
- wait for them to leave and pick up the trash for them?
- do nothing?
- other? (specify)
Eco-Ethics

Dilemma Card
You have a job at a restaurant and notice that each day prepared meals are left over and are discarded. You feel this is a waste of good food, especially since many people in your city are without adequate food. Would you:
• suggest to management that leftover food be donated to a local homeless shelter?
• suggest to management that less food be prepared each day?
• do nothing?
• other? (specify)

Dilemma Card
You are an influential member of the community. On your way home from work, you are stopped by a police officer and cited for having excessive auto emissions. Would you:
• use your influence to have the ticket invalidated?
• sell the car to some unsuspecting person?
• work to change the law?
• get your car fixed and pay the ticket?
• other? (specify)

Dilemma Card
A friend asks you a question about sex and how to prevent pregnancy. Although you don’t know the answer for sure, you know enough to guess. What would you do and why? Would you:
• make up an answer based on the facts you know?
• try to help find the answer in a health book or in the library?
• suggest your friend talk to his/her parents or a teacher?
• admit to your friend that you do not know for sure?
• suggest talking to a sibling?
• other? (specify)

Dilemma Card
There is an undeveloped green space in your town where you and your friends sometimes go for peace and quiet. It’s home to some local wildlife and a small creek. The town officials are thinking about selling the land to a developer who wants to build a shopping mall. The mall would provide some jobs for area high school students. The mall also might be a place for you and your friends to hang out. What would you do and why? Would you:
• support the mall project at the expense of your green area?
• oppose the mall project all together?
• go to a city planning meeting to see if developers would consider another site?
• do nothing and let the adults decide?
• other? (specify)
Eco-Ethics

Dilemma Card
Your friend has just given you a lovely ivory necklace that she purchased on a trip to Africa. You are aware that African elephants are being slaughtered for their ivory tusks and are now an endangered species. Would you:
- accept the necklace and wear it often?
- accept the necklace but keep it in a drawer?
- explain to your friend why you do not wish to accept her gift?
- other? (specify)

Dilemma Card
Your parents make you mow and water your lawn. The area hasn’t had much rainfall for some time and area officials are recommending that everyone conserve water. However, your neighborhood has strict rules about keeping each yard in order. Without regular watering your lawn will turn brown. What would you do and why? Would you:
- ignore the conservation warning and continue watering your lawn to keep it looking nice?
- sacrifice the beauty of your lawn by watering less often?
- plant different things in your yard that do not require so much care?
- other? (specify)

Dilemma Card
Your cafeteria at school has attempted to prepare food items that are popular with students (hamburgers, hot dogs, pepperoni pizza, fried chicken, etc.). While you and your friends enjoy these foods, you know that most of these items are high on the food chain, requiring intensive amounts of water and energy to produce. You are also aware that much of the grain produced in this country is used to feed livestock, while much of the world suffers from hunger and malnutrition. Would you:
- meet with school administrators to suggest having more meatless lunches served each week?
- bring your own lunch and not worry about the cafeteria menu?
- eat whatever is served?
- other? (specify)

Dilemma Card
The school you attend is not in walking distance of your home. You could catch the bus on the corner or drive in with a friend. The car would get you to school faster and without waiting outside. But the bus uses less gas per passenger. Would you:
- take the bus?
- get a ride in the car?
- carpool with other kids nearby?
- ride your bicycle?
- other? (specify)
Think Globally, Act Locally

Student Activity 31

Introduction:
Although some global issues may seem insurmountable, there are usually actions we can take as individuals on the local level that, collectively, will alleviate these problems and educate others. Sometimes there are varying degrees of involvement that are easy or very difficult to accomplish. Often, we have to weigh the potential effectiveness of possible actions to determine the best way to proceed. In this activity, students will consider various actions and potential outcomes to respond to many of the issues addressed in the previous activities.

Procedure:
1. For each global and local challenge listed in the attached chart: have students, either individually or in groups, add as many ideas as they can think of to the personal actions/potential solutions list. You might want to compile all ideas onto one class list.
2. Next have the students assess which aspects of the global and local problem are addressed by each idea. For example, recycling car oil will help the water pollution problem and lessen health problems caused by poor quality drinking water; thus students should write “A,1” in the Problems Addressed section on the chart.
3. The next two columns can be filled in together. Students should first evaluate the degree of personal commitment each idea would involve, rating the ideas: Easy, Average, or Difficult. Then students should evaluate the degree of effectiveness for each idea: Unlikely, Somewhat likely, Very likely.

Discussion Questions:
1. Review the list of global problems related to overpopulation. Should any of the categories be changed? Any additions to or subtractions from the list? Ask students to arrange the list in order of importance or priority to them.
2. Also review the local problems list. Do any modifications seem appropriate for this list? Note similarities and differences between the global problems and local manifestations.
3. Some of the personal actions from the solutions list will positively affect more than one problem. For example, using the car less affects air pollution, global warming and energy conservation. Have students note which ideas help more than one problem and draw arrows on their chart to the other global and local challenges affected.

4. Also, some actions may help solve one problem while contributing to another. An example of this is switching from disposable diapers to cloth. Using cloth diapers helps the waste disposal problem, since less mass will be sent to landfills; it also requires large amount of hot water to clean the diapers, thus contributing to the energy and water pollution problems. Have students circle the ideas which have such a dual effect and write the problem(s) negatively affected next to it.
5. Finally, discuss the intangible benefits of doing what you can to solve a problem. Is it possible to feel better by taking an action that by itself will not solve the problem than by doing nothing at all? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activity:
Ask students to look at their completed charts and determine whether there are any potential “actions” that they have done in the past, are doing currently or might want to do as a result of evaluating the effectiveness of personal activities to address certain global and local problems. Are there any actions best taken by a group of people, such as a school ecology club or civic organization?

Concept:
To avoid becoming overwhelmed by global problems, we should concentrate on the local level, focusing on meaningful actions individuals can take to participate in global problem-solving.

Objectives:
Students will be able to:
• List personal actions which could help alleviate many of the global challenges discussed throughout the curriculum.
• Assess proposal actions on their potential effectiveness and convenience.

Subjects:
Environmental science, social studies, family life, civics/government

Skills:
Brainstorming, evaluation, critical thinking

Method:
Students come up with ways they, as individuals, can help meet the challenges to environmental quality and human well-being posed by global population pressures. They then think critically about the potential effectiveness of these proposed actions.

Materials:
Copies of Student Worksheets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Challenges Related to Population Pressures</th>
<th>Global Challenges Related to Population Pressures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Population Growth</td>
<td>A. Country's people is increasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Overuse of resources</td>
<td>B. Climate change and biodiversity loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change</td>
<td>C. Increased global warming and extreme climate events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Global warming/climate change</td>
<td>D. Ocean acidification and rise in sea levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Damage to ecosystems</td>
<td>E. Change in ocean current patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Deforestation</td>
<td>F. Increased atmospheric carbon dioxide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminishing Air Quality</td>
<td>G. Death of forests and wildlife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Acid rain</td>
<td>H. Increased rainfall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Airborne poisons</td>
<td>I. Increased in air pollution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Issues</td>
<td>J. Increased in water pollution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Water pollution</td>
<td>K. Increased in water usage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Acid rain</td>
<td>L. Increased in acid rain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Actions/ Potential Solutions</th>
<th>Degree of Effectiveness:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write a letter to the editor about the problem of habitat destruction.</td>
<td>Unlikely, Somewhat, Likely, Very Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit the number of children you have to two or fewer.</td>
<td>Somewhat, Likely, Very Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant trees and shrubs in your yard.</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check your car for smog control devices (and use unleaded gas).</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take short showers instead of baths.</td>
<td>Very Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep your clothes washing by hand.</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use fewer vegetable products.</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat fewer fish.</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize a local food drive.</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat fewer on the food chain.</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Worksheet</strong></td>
<td><strong>Think Globally, Act Locally</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Challenges Related to Population Pressures</td>
<td>Local Challenges Related to Population Pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| A. Population growth creates more waste         | 1. Overfull landfills (often improperly contained and sealed) | - Begin a local recycling program.  
- Buy products with minimal packaging. |                                 |                               |                                               |
| B. Careless consumption patterns cause more waste | 2. Toxins from incinerators                      |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | 3. Smell from large compost plants               |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | **Loss of Biodiversity**                         |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
| A. Nonrenewable resources becoming scarce      | 1. Possible medical cures lost                   | - When hiking or camping, try not to alter the natural habitat in any way.  
- Join a wildlife protection society and start a local chapter. |                                 |                               |                                               |
| B. Fossil fuel dependence creates environmental problems | 2. Wildlife gene pool decreased                 |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | 3. Beauty lost                                   |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | **Energy**                                      |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
| A. Nonrenewable resources becoming scarce      | 1. Air pollution cause health risks              | - Install a solar hot water heater in your home.  
- Organize a car pool system for local commuters. |                                 |                               |                                               |
| B. Fossil fuel dependence creates environmental problems | 2. Oil spills cause environmental damage         |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | 3. Political unrest due to competing for limited resources |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | 4. Traffic jams due to auto dependence          |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | **Poverty/Homelessness**                         |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
| A. Additional numbers needing food/shelter can make economic growth difficult, perpetuating the poverty cycle.  
B. Wealth is unevenly distributed                | 1. Inadequate food and shelter for many         | - Organize a food and clothing drive for a local charity.  
- Volunteer to tutor at a local homeless shelter. |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | 2. Health and literacy levels are low           |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | **Status of Women**                             |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
| A. Women have many children when they are most valued for bearing sons.  
B. Without education, women often do not know how to obtain and use family planning methods. | 1. Women have families which are too large to support | - Write letters of encouragement to local women who are positive role models.  
- Inform your legislators that you support measures to help raise the status of women both domestically and internationally. |                                 |                               |                                               |
|                                                 | 2. Women miss opportunities to be anything other than caretakers |                                       |                                 |                               |                                               |
A Nonbearing Account

Introduction:

In 1729, Jonathan Swift wrote the now classic article, “A Modest Proposal,” a grotesque satire on the twin Irish problems of overpopulation and food shortage during that time. Not to be taken seriously as a plan for solving these problems, Swift’s satire was meant to create awareness and get people talking about these social issues.

In the following article, “A Nonbearing Account,” Professor Noel Perrin outlines his plan for lowering fertility rates in an effort to curb population growth. He describes why the program is necessary, how it should be implemented, and the anticipated costs and benefits. While not nearly as outlandish (or inhumane) as Swift’s proposal, Perrin’s article was probably written more as a tool for discussion than as a plan likely to be adopted by the federal government. Even so, many readers may find Perrin’s ideas compelling and creative.

Procedure:

Distribute copies of “A Nonbearing Account.” After students have a chance to read the article, lead a discussion using the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think of Perrin’s idea to pay females of childbearing age not to have children?
2. Do you think his idea would work in the United States, significantly decreasing fertility rates? Would many women decide against childbearing entirely? Why or why not?
4. Perrin compares the financial costs of his plan to current costs of the U.S. welfare system. Do you think implementation of his plan would significantly reduce federal assistance to the indigent?
5. What do you feel is Perrin’s attitude toward the status of women in the United States? In developing countries?
6. Do you think Perrin’s plan would be possible to implement? Is it realistic?
7. Perrin notes that there is a precedent for governments paying women to have children. What sort of precedents might he have in mind? Can you think of any ways the U.S. government encourages childbearing? (Note: Perrin is most likely referring to tax incentives to have children.)
8. Do you think Perrin wrote this article to seriously win support for his plan or just to heighten awareness of population pressures by offering a “modest proposal”?

Follow-up Activity:

Have students draft their own “modest proposal” for slowing (or stopping) population growth nationally or globally, working either individually or in pairs. The proposal should clearly outline the necessity of the plan, logistics, costs and benefits. Students should be as persuasive as possible in their writing assignment.
A Nonbearing Account*

by Noel Perrin

Sometime in 1987 world population hit 5 billion. Sometime a little before 2000 it will hit 6 billion. Sometime around 2010 . . . Obviously growth like this can't continue indefinitely. We'll run out of parking space for all the cars. We'll run out of flight paths for all the airplanes. We'll eventually run out of essentials like food. A country like Nepal has already run out of firewood.

But how do you stop the relentless increase of humanity, currently proceeding at the rate of almost 2 million a week? Well, the interesting idea I've heard is to do it with money. More specifically, bank accounts. One for every woman in the world. Forget the rest of the world for a minute: here is how the plan would work in the United States. Every girl, when she reached puberty, would notify her local population center. (These sunny offices had better be staffed entirely by women — well-paid ones, too.) At that moment a financial clock would start ticking.

If the girl went the next year without having a baby, she would get a government check for $500, placed in the bank account the center now opened for her. She could take it all out and spend it on angora sweaters, if she wanted. She could leave it in as the beginning of a fund for college. Whatever she liked. The next year, if she still hadn’t had a baby, the government would increase the sum by a hundred, so that her second check would be for $600. The year after, $700. A young woman reaching the age of 20, and still not having had a child, would receive a check for around $1,200. No fortune, but worth having. Available without any discrimination of any kind. A Miss du Pont, an ordinary kid in Topeka, an intending nun, a teenage prostitute, all would get their checks.

Suppose the young woman wants a child, though. There’s nothing to stop her, except a little financial self-interest. If at 21 she proceeded to have a baby, fine. Let’s have a baby shower. The government payment, however, would abruptly drop to zero. But then, if she did not have another baby the next year, back would come a check for $500. If she went two years, she’d get $600, and so on up the modest pay ladder. A pleasant little extra income for the sex that has historically been underpaid.

Great bargain: What would all this cost? In the case of women who never do have children, plenty. Start at 13 with a check for $500 and by the time you reached menopause at 53, the check would be $4,500. To that point, you would have received a total of almost $100,000. A lot of money. But still a bargain. A great bargain. The same hundred thousand is about half the cost of bringing up one abandoned child in New York City. It’s less than a fifth the cost of bringing up one psychologically disturbed child in a group home in the District of Columbia. The total cost the first year would be about a billion dollars in payments to girls, maybe 2 or 3 billion to set up the centers. The total cost the fifth year would be around $10 billion. The cost wouldn’t level off for about 40 years — and when it did, it would still be under what we now pay as welfare. And most of the money would flow back out immediately to stores or get turned over somewhat later to happy bursars at colleges.
A Nonbearing Account

Do I possibly exaggerate when I say that when the plan was in full operation, and every woman in the country between puberty and menopause receiving her check, the cost would still be less than that of the current welfare system? I don’t think I do. Try looking in the Statistical Abstract of the United States. The current figure is $770 billion a year — $298 billion in state and local money, $472 billion from the federal government. That table covers many things, including VA hospitals. So turn to a more modest table, the one called “Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons With Limited Incomes.” Here the total is $114 billion, all federal money.

Such a plan would be much harder to implement in, say, India, where most people don’t have bank accounts and where the government would be hard pressed to find the funds. But it wouldn’t be impossible. Such payment could be the first-ever democratic foreign aid — putting money directly in the hands of women, rather than in the pockets of businessmen and bureaucrats. Furthermore, India has already found ways to pay men to have vasectomies.

Of course there are problems with such a plan. Men will object to all this money going to women, money being power. There are bound to be accusations of racism, even though the offer would be voluntary, universal and totally color blind. There being no precedent (though there’s plenty of precedent for the opposite case: governments paying women to have children), it would be hard to get started. The more stolid type of politician will call the plan impossible, utopian, dreamy, absurd.

But consider the alternatives. One, of course, is to go on exactly as we are — adding a billion people every few years until there is no more tropical forest, no more oxygen-carbon dioxide balance, no more space, and our world collapses in disaster. Another is nuclear war. A third (the likeliest, I expect) is mandatory birth control, starting one country at a time, with all the repression that implies. The repression is already there in China. And with the rigid immigration restrictions imposed by those countries that have started early against those that start late. Maybe even with population wars. How much more graceful to do it all with checks.

Noel Perrin is professor of English at Dartmouth College. He has written for The New Yorker and New York magazine.

* Reprinted with permission from Noel Perrin. The original article appears in Newsweek, April 2, 1980.
In Search of Sustainable Life

Student Activity 33

Introduction:
Planning for a quality future requires defining what “quality” means to people. We all want to live in a community that not only contains all the resources we need to survive, but is also safe, clean and provides adequate services. Such a community is possible as long as we take responsibility for the overall quality of life affecting ourselves, family, friends, and future generations. How can we tell if our quality of life has improved or deteriorated? The historically-used GNP and GDP indicators (Gross National Product and Gross Domestic Product) tell only the story of economic activity, omitting many of the social and environmental factors that contribute to quality of life. Factors such as safety, water quality and natural beauty should also be considered.

The purpose of this activity is to let the students explore those factors — factors that address the concept of sustainability. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, a sustainable community is “one which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” Students will exchange ideas and develop their own community’s Quality of Life Index.

Procedure:

1. To begin the exercise, have students share their responses to: “The one thing I would like to add or eliminate from my life to make me happy would be...” and “The one thing I would like to add or eliminate from my community to benefit most residents would be...”

   After students have thought personally and heard what their peers value, ask how the concepts of quality of life and sustainability relate to their responses.

2. Break the students up into small groups to brainstorm factors that they think contribute to a community’s lasting quality of life. In Part 1, students may have thought of specific things to add to the community, but now they will be thinking in broader terms about the factors that comprise a healthy community over a long period of time, such as protected and adequate supply of drinking water and availability of good jobs.

3. After students have brainstormed for several minutes, ask each group to select and rank the seven most important factors for a community’s quality of life.

4. An indicator is used to measure changes in a factor, e.g., a change in GNP indicates that our economy is growing or shrinking. In this step, students will develop indicators for each of the group’s seven factors. For instance, to measure crime (a factor), you can use the crime rate statistics from the police department as an indicator. Open space (another factor) can be indicated by the amount of public park land or forest. Remind students of the importance of factor measurability when making an index.

5. Have each group present its indicators.

   Conduct a class vote to determine the top ten indicators of a community’s health and sustainability.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think each of its indicators should carry the same weight?

2. What criteria will you use to weigh the indicators?

3. Would grouping these categories enhance the class index? (See “Index” for suggestions)

Follow-up Activities:

1. Select one of the factors for students to research in their own community. They should find out how to measure the factor (in order to make it an indicator), what role the indicator plays in their own community and research whether the indicators show improvement or decline in recent years. Students can draw up and send proposals addressing any of the indicators to local leaders and government officials. They might also want to send the list of ten indicators they developed as a class, so that city officials can determine what students care about in their community.

   Example: If students select “crime” as one of the indicators, they could call the local police department to get statistics on the crime rate and how it is measured. They could also ask how this rate compares to that of neighbor-

Concept:
Planning for a quality future requires defining what “quality” means to all of us.

Objectives:
Students will be able to:
• Develop a Quality of Life Index.
• Express visions of a desirable community.
• Brainstorm important factors for a community’s quality of life.
• Define the term sustainable community.

Subjects:
Social studies, economics, government/civics

Skills:
Brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making, writing, researching data

Method:
Through a class brainstorming and a cooperative learning activity, students develop an index of what they consider to be the ten most important indicators of a healthy community.
In Search of Sustainable Life

Student Worksheet 33

1. If your social studies curriculum includes the study of different areas of the world, have students compare the quality of life in their community to one that has been studied in class in a different country. How are they similar and dissimilar? Have students write a one-page paper comparing the two communities.

2. Has the crime rate gone up or down in recent years? Why might this be the case? Is crime a problem in and around schools? What are some proposals for making their area safer?
Generations Apart

Introduction:

Communities with recent new growth have probably undergone significant changes over the past decades. Those areas experiencing economic declines may also have undergone serious change in recent years. Good resources to document these changes are a community’s senior citizens. In this activity students interview older residents to compare today’s environment to its past.

Procedure:

1. It is useful to precede this activity with Activity 33: In Search of Sustainable Life.
2. Tell the students that they will be conducting interviews with older community residents. Ask them what questions they think will elicit the most relevant responses to the indicators decided upon in the Class Index from Activity 33: In Search of Sustainable Life. Students should, however, feel free to ask about other aspects of historical life in their communities. Keep a list on the board of their responses. Put together a sample questionnaire using both the students’ and your own suggestions (See Sample Questionnaire).
3. Provide the students with a list of different options for interviewees (senior center residents, grandparents, nursing home residents, elderly community members). Many students will be first-generation residents so doing a bit of networking with nursing homes and/or retirement communities may be a good idea before sending students out.
4. Working in pairs or individually, students should spend about a week conducting their interview and constructing a written/oral report for class presentation.

Note: Try to make the exercise as “place specific” as possible. Much of the lesson’s significance lies in communicating the uniqueness of each area and fostering a new appreciation for community. For example, a rural area on the East Coast will have a much different history than a core city in the Southwest.

The Interview:

1. Encourage the students to retell some of the stories they hear during interviews in class. Hearing about other’s experiences can often bring valuable perspectives to one’s own work. There may be students who had difficulty in their interviews and would like to talk about that with the class as well.
2. Following up this section with a fact sheet of local historical information is a good way to round out the exercise. Ask your local historical society or library if they can provide one. Guest lecturers or storytellers are also good resources.
3. Creating a time line with the class’s new-found information may help the students visualize how the community has changed over the years. Draw a horizontal line on a large piece of paper with vertical branches to represent different periods of times or years. Label each branch with a fact or event from the time period. Be sure to label the whole diagram with a larger block of time (for example: the 1900’s).

Follow-up Activity:

Supplement the interviews with library research using the same statistical resources about the community such as population change over time, demographics, employment and industry, cultural trends and environmental trends. Ask your school or town librarian how best to search for resources that document both the statistical data of the community in the present day and that available when the senior citizens were growing up. Provide a list of these sources to aid the students. The students will gain experience with both interactive and library research.

Concept:

Changes in population and technology affect communities over time. Observations of older residents can provide insight into a community’s past, present and future.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:
• Draw comparisons between the present-day community and that of an earlier time depicted by the older residents of the area.
• Foster new relationships with senior citizens and city officials in their communities.
• Identify changes that have occurred over the past decades and their effect on the community.
• Develop a questionnaire and conduct interviews with community residents.
• Create a time line depicting their community’s history.

Subjects:

Social studies

Skills:

Research, writing, public speaking, interviewing

Method:

Students interview senior citizens in their community to broaden their perspective in how their community has changed over the decades with respect to population, economics and the environment.

Materials

Sample questions (photocopy for students)

Local resources about the history of the community (optional)
1. How long and where have you lived in this area?

2. Can you think of any anecdotes that depict the community setting when you first came here/when you were growing up?

3. How has the community improved/changed since you’ve lived here?

4. What changes do you think have not been beneficial to the residents?

5. What was/were the main occupation/s or cash crop/s?

6. What businesses have disappeared or changed into something new?

7. Were there any farms near by? Was the area residential or urban?

8. Do you think the landscape has changed over time? What are some of the most obvious changes?

9. Was there much crime?

10. What was it like for families bringing up children?

11. What were the schools like? What were class sizes like?

12. Did a large percentage of kids graduate from high school in your community?

13. Were there any periods of population increase or decrease that you noticed? How did that affect the area/community? For example, were there ever overly crowded classrooms or a lot of traffic congestion?

14. Were people sparsely settled?

15. Were people very poor/wealthy?

16. What was happening in the news?